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ABSTRACT

The effect of language variation on language teaching is considered. It is suggested there has been a shift away from the notion that a language can be perceived by learners as a fixed system to an emphasis on its negotiability in a social context. This is not precisely the shift from grammatical concerns to functional ones, for it arises out of methodology rather than linguistic description. Examples of descriptive procedures that have been adapted to language teaching include notions and functions, and procedural syllabuses. On the other hand, the methodological tradition promotes greater student freedom of maneuver than was customary in the past and alternatively ignores linguistic grading. The methodological model emphasizes language learning rather than language teaching, and views teachers as facilitators of language acquisition. Differences between teaching and learning that make it impossible to view them as obverse processes are addressed. It is suggested that teaching is the performance of certain rituals, while learning is the effective acquisition of knowledge or ability. Teaching may be viewed as being primarily about availability, while learning may be thought of as effective internalization. Teachers implement a syllabus and correct students; learning occurs in the process of using language and improvising language samples presented through teaching. It is suggested that this distinction of teaching and learning provides a partial explanation for the attraction of methodological solutions to the problem of language variation, accords with a functionalistic approach to language acquisition, and is consistent with the intuitions of many experienced teachers about how they operate in language classes. (SW)

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LANGUAGE VARIATION AND THE DEATH OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

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It would be foolish, if interesting, to argue that our attitudes to linguistic variation will lead to the death of the language teaching profession, but it is a great deal less foolish to argue that teaching, in the sense of imparting knowledge, cannot survive the recognition that linguistic systems are fluid and flexible, rather than idealised and static. I wish to argue that there has been a genuine paradigm shift in language teaching, the impact of which is only beginning to be felt. This is a shift away from the notion that a language can be perceived by learners as a fixed system to an emphasis on its negotiability in a social context. Learners are no longer learning basic sentences to establish the fundamental patterns of the language (Prendergast, 1872), but they are learning how to mean (Halliday, 1975).

As with any major shift of emphasis, there have been contributory factors from a variety of sources to this one. Particularly, methodologists in both mother tongue and foreign language teaching have responded both to the experience of classroom practice and to the shifts of emphasis in linguistic theory of the past few decades. It is clear from Prendergast's writings a hundred years ago that statements about sentence patterns reflect not simply a methodological principle, but also a view of what knowledge of a language consists of - and this is of course a view which was much more understandable in the shadow of the classical tradition of teaching dead languages mainly through their literature, and in the absence of recording devices to reify, if not stabilise, spoken linguistic data. But mother tongue methodologists like Barnes and Britton (Barnes, Britton, Rosen, 1969) and foreign language methodologists like Allwright (1977) and Johnson (1979) have increasingly insisted on the need for learners to create language for themselves through interaction with other speakers. In part this approach derives from the work of Vygotsky (1962) and other Soviet psychologists, in part from a pragmatic response to classroom practices, in part from an increased sensitivity to the languages and dialects of hitherto undervalued groups, and in part to philosophical and anthropological traditions reflected in the work of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) on the one hand, and Hymes (1971) and Labov (1972) on the other.

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But this is not precisely the shift simply from grammatical concerns to functional ones, for it arises out of methodology rather than linguistic description and has been as much influenced by people right outside linguistics or applied linguistics as it has by those inside. How has it come about?

The standard approach to linguistic description involves a process of

Linguistic forms are regularised and standardised so that variation between speakers or between the same speaker on one occasion opposed to another are eliminated. There are recognised procedures for ensuring consistency in the construction of a grammar of a language. And of course such idealisation is essential if description is to be approached in a principled way at all. For the purposes of description this, or a series of analogous procedures, is unavoidable.

But description of a language cannot be identified with learning a language, nor with teaching it. Indeed, descriptive devices may create teaching methods which are actually inappropriate. The heavy emphasis in pronunciation teaching on minimal pair practice, and the consequent emphasis in segmental rather than suprasegmental features, seems to reflect the techniques and sequencing of descriptive phonetics rather than the priorities of many teaching situations. But even more serious, too strong a concern for the techniques of description may create a paradigm which inhibits development not only in areas where science can be applied, but within science itself.

Out of dissatisfaction with the concept of an idealised, static model two independent traditions have developed. On the one hand there has been the attempt to specify variable rules, to reformulate competence as communicative competence and to specify the 'rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless' (Hymes, 1971:15). This has been essentially an attempt to expand the descriptive model, and has led to various descriptive procedures being adapted to language teaching. Notions and functions (van Ek, 1975; Wilkins, 1976), needs analyses specified in various ways (Munby, 1978), and procedural syllabuses (Candlin and Breen, 1980) are all illustrations of this trend. On the other hand, the methodological tradition referred to earlier has developed, in part going back to Newmark (1966), andproduced teaching which allows students much greater freedom of manoeuvre than was customary in the past, or which alternatively ignores linguistic grading altogether (Prabhu and Carroll, 1980). Insofar as the descriptive model has been applied to the classroom, the integrity of language teaching has remained inviolate; but insofar as the methodological model has been influential, language teaching has been replaced by language learning, facilitated by teachers, or - more recently - by an insistence on a distinction between learning and acquisition (Krashen, 1981). Discussion of this distinction is often rather confused, but essentially acquisition is held to be unconscious, natural and effective, while learning is held to be conscious, unnatural and less effective. 'Teaching' is seen as the obverse of 'learning', and a new role has to be found for those who organise classrooms. They now become facilitators of acquisition.

There is a lot of cant in the discussion of new terms for the varied

functions of teachers, and much discussion in language teaching circles displays unfortunate ignorance of such basic educational philosophical positions as Dewey's 'learning by doing' (Dewey, 1916), let alone of the work of earlier language teaching theorists. Nonetheless, there have been changes in the role of the teacher which have impinged on the classroom through more recent movements. From Freire (1971) comes the notion of teacher as agitator, with an insistence on language activity as being dependent on response to people's deepest social needs, with implications for political activity. From other sources (Curran, 1976 among others) there is a demand for the teacher as participant in a therapeutic process, in which the teacher requires the teaching as desperately as the learner requires the learning. More directly therapeutic models, mainly through the ideas of Rogers (1969) and the encounter group movement, can be seen to underlie 'humanistic' approaches to language teaching, most particularly in the work of Moskowitz (1978). Various other approaches to language teaching such as Lozanov's Suggestopaedia (1 978) and Gattegno's Silent Way (1972) have been rather confusingly grouped with the humanistic movement, most influentially through their juxtaposition in Stevick's discussions(1976 & 1980). They share a concern to break traditional language teaching moulds, but Lozanov's work is essentially an application of a particular learning theory, while Gattegno's works backwards from a pragmatic and personal approach to language learning. The justification for grouping all these together relies mainly on their explicit concern for what learners themselves bring to the learning process. This, however, is not uniquely the prerogative of humanistic theorists, but a recurrent theme of educational discussion. Moskowitz's comment (1978:11) that 'traditionally education pours content into the student. Affective education draws it out of the student' is simply a paraphrase of a cliché of traditional educational discourse. Altogether, though, the emphasis on individual learner creativity has been a beneficial reaction against the potential aridities of pure audiolingualism. The specific methods produced, though, do indicate a paradox, for the more allegedly student-centred the procedure, the more firmly established seem to be the rules for teachers to observe. Gattegno, Lozanov, and Curran have all founded schools of followers who seem intolerant of departures from the basic patterns of behaviour laid down for teachers, and students. It is by no means clear that adoption of humanistic procedures will free more than it binds. The method intrudes, even if the teacher does not.

The source of the general difficulty to which all of these various

teaching and learning. There are crucial differences between the two processes which make it impossible to conceive of one as simply the obverse of the other. It is probably most helpful to show these in a chart.

	Teaching	Learning
1.	Causative by intention	may occur willingly or unwillingly.
2.	Linear: it takes place in real time	may be linear or holistic.
3.	Can be planned	cannot be planned.
4.	The product of conscious effort	?usually not.
5.	Based on a syllabus	not based on a syllabus.
6.	Testable in principle because it can be observed by 'experts' hence	only the results can be tested, not the process.
7.	experts can be produced: a profession	experts cannot be produced.
8.	Administratively constrained	not constrained.
9.	Effectiveness cannot be measured	effectiveness can be measured by results.

Essentially these differences result from the facts that teaching is overt and public, while learning is covert and private. Of course learning can take place in a public place, but teaching is the performance of certain rituals, while learning is the effective acquisition of some knowledge or ability. What, then, is the role of teaching in the process of learning?

If we think of teaching as being primarily about availability, and learning as about effective internalisation , this may clarify our discussion of methodology somewhat. The teacher, through presentation of language - that is through the implementation of a pedagogic syllabus, - and through the process of correction, is aiming to make available to the student the tokens of the language through which the student can construct a viable dialect for use. The process of teaching is thus analogous to presenting a student with a dictionary or grammar book. Even traditional accuracy-based teaching procedures - drilling, written slot-filling exercises, etc. - are not about learning to operate the language, but only about making available for potential use. The learning occurs in the process of using, and particularly in the process of improvisation with tokens of the language which have been presented through teaching or other means of exposure. The native speaker picks up tokens by the process of living with other native speakers (Halliday, 1975), and out of them

aims. The non-native speaker has to have an alternative, and more artificial means of exposure to the tokens, but the construction of the currency must be a social act, and it is the construction that is the learning, not the simple acquisition of unnegotiable tokens. The act of teaching is a prelude to the act of learning, but it will not lead to learning if opportunities for teacher-free language work ~~xxxxx~~ do not occur. For part of the time at least the teacher must cease teaching and simply become a participant in a linguistic community.

All this is speculative, and psychologically so vague as to be unhelpful. ~~However~~ we are not engaged in a psychological discussion but a methodological one. An attempt to distinguish teaching from learning in this way enables us to remain consistent with the intuitions of many experienced teachers about how they operate in language classes, provides a partial explanation for the attraction of methodological solutions to the problem of language variation, accords with a functionalist approach to language acquisition, and gives trainee teachers a rule of thumb to operate, for they can classify the work they do as accuracy-based or fluency (i.e.learning)-based. The death of teaching need not imply the death of the teacher.

It may be objected, though, that a methodological discussion such as this has value in educational circles but very little relevance to applications of linguistics. I think this would be a mistaken view. For one thing the evidence of the classroom is evidence from one of the few relatively natural settings in which language is the chief justification for the interaction, so that a description of language must take into account any difficulties confronted by classroom practitioners. For another, teachers are, among other things, users of linguistic descriptions, and the limitations of descriptions in the classroom provide useful evidence for their efficiency in relation to language acquisition and use. If the problem-based perspective of teaching leads us to demand that language for learning should be closely related to the feelings, ambitions and desires of learners, this is important evidence of an aspect of language variation which has hitherto been little studied. Only through discussions such as this, couched in the terms of other interests than description can linguistics retain its relationship with language, rather than with a reification and idealisation of its own invention. It is true that teaching is not description, but it needs the descriptions of linguists, and linguists need the problems of teachers as part of their data. Both linguistics and language teaching have to come to terms with language variation. ~~Perhaps~~ language variation has led to modification ~~of~~ teachings let us hope it does not that development

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